Media Literacy in Library and Information Centres: practical perspectives

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Abstract

The primary objective of every academic library is to meet the information need(s) of members of the community and to help the institution to achieve its objective of promoting teaching, learning and research. To achieve this, the library usually delivers different services in order to meet the information needs of the user community. In the information-rich environment of the 21st century, library managers need to be both discriminating users and skillful creators of information using media literacy skills. This study focused on how media literacy skills such as accessibility, analytical, evaluation, communication and participative skills can be adopted in libraries and information centres in service delivery.

Keyword: Media Literacy, Accessibility Skill, Analytical Skill, Evaluation Skill, Communication Skill. Participative Skill and Service Delivery.

Introduction

Media is the cornerstone of social change in many aspects including the library. It is a product of the communication needs of individuals and it also fulfill the function of gathering news, information and entertainment. It generates a variety of information and knowledge for posterity. Accessibility to this treasury of information and knowledge in printed and electronic formats are available through variety of secondary products and services which are organised and stored in libraries and information centres. Media provides opportunities for creativity, disseminates information and allows a high degree of access to both education and entertainment information among others.

The society is saturated with variety of media such as print, non-print and electronic media tools. This forces the expansion of the concept of literacy from just reading and writing to media literacy which involves using several media tools to access, understand and create communication. Media literacy enables librarians to browse, access, evaluate and involve in intellectual thinking about a plethora of media contents. Librarians locate, retrieve and disseminate information so as to make wise decisions related to the problems that users face usually regarding information needs and helps to decipher complex content into an easy comprehensible form.

Media literacy among library staff is important today because more library staff have practical access to variety of media in libraries and information centres. On the importance of being media literate, International Federated Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) (2018) asserted that media literacy is to have the ability to use media devices to its fullest-efficiently,

effectively and ethically to meet the information needs in personal, civic and professional lives since the media has the potential to shape personalities and change the way one perceives and understand the world and immediate reality. At this point, media literacy gains great importance in order to make library staff more conscious and to eliminate negative effects of mass media.

Owing to being media literate, library staff will be able to receive the messages of media tools through a critical judgment and decode the messages of media as active individuals instead of being passive receivers. Transforming library staff to media literate ones is only possible with media literacy skills. European Charter for Media Literacy, for instance, listed seven key skills that media literate people should have and these include (i) using media effectively, (ii) accessing and making informed choices about media content, (iii) understanding media content creation, (iv) analysing media techniques and messages, (v) using media to communicate, (vi) avoiding harmful media content and services, and (vii) using media for democratic rights and civic purposes. It is based on this premise, that this study will identify various media literacy skills necessary in libraries and information centres and how they can be useful in service delivery.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is predicated on the uses and gratification theory by Katz, et al (1974). The theory was propounded in 1974 by the trio of Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch. It was developed to explain why audiences do not passively wait for the mass media messages to arrive, but actively and deliberately seek out forms of content that provide them with information that they need, like and use. The theory presupposes that members of the public will actively select and use specific forms of media contents to fulfill their needs and provide gratifications of their interests and motives. As an audience-based theory, uses and gratification

theory hypothesizes that different consumers use the same media messages for different purposes, depending on their individual needs and goals. The theory perceives the recipient of media messages as actively influencing the effect process, since they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the media messages on the basis of their needs and belief. The essence of the uses and gratifications theory therefore, is to consider media behaviour in terms of how humans create and satisfy needs.

The theory postulates that gratifications can be derived not only from media content, but as well as from the very act of exposure to a given medium, as well as from the context in which it is consumed. Thus, despite the criticisms against the uses and gratifications theory, it remains the dominant model for answering the all-important question: What do people do with the media? the uses and gratifications theory is based on the assumptions that (1) the audience is active, (2) the media choice lies with the audience member, (3) all mediums compete with other sources of need/goal fulfillment, (4) mass media goals can be found in the message of the source, and (5) cultural value judgments should not be taken into consideration as the audience explores their own opinions.

This theory is related to the study as librarians apply media literacy skills in selecting media resources like print media, electronic media, social media, internet and database as means to fulfill the library objectives and goals of disseminating information. This study is best explained within the framework of the uses and gratification theory because the theory provides insight into why some media resources are so widely used and others are not.

Concept of Media literacy skills

The primary objective of every academic library is to meet the information need(s) of members of the community and also to help the institution to achieve its objective of promoting learning and research. To achieve this, the library usually delivers different services in order to meet the information needs of the user community. In the information-rich environment of the 21st century, library managers need to be both discriminating consumers and skillful creators of information in a range of technologies through the use of media literacy skills. Media literacy skills, defined as the ability to find and use information, becomes a most important quality which can provide definite advantages in all ways of life including the library.

Media literacy skills refer to the understanding of media and the use of it as a source of information, entertainment, enrichment, growth, empowerment, and communication (Chen *et al*, 2011). Schaefer (2015) pointed out that media literacy skill is usually conceptualised as a set of skills related to the production of a media message. Covington (2004) advocated the notion that media literacy skills comprises critical viewing skills and the ability to regard, evaluate, and interpret content. Therefore, library staff can develop the ability to manage information overload, to construct a personal understanding from diverse and often inconsistent information messages, and to keep learning in a constantly changing environment for effective provision of quality media resources to users. These abilities can be developed through media literacy because the new information-based economy requires information literate workers who are able to think critically, to analyze and interpret information and to master new evolving technologies.

The concept of media literacy is also called media education or media awareness (Schmidt, 2013). According to the definition established by the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy as reported by Chen et al (2011) media literacy skills is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of forms like television, video, cinema, advertisements, internet and so on. The first systematic definition of media literacy was made in 1978 by SirkkaMinkinken. Barut et al (2016) reported that media literacy targets to develop skills at informative, ethical, philosophical and aesthetical aspects. American Library Association (2020) defines media literacy to be the ability to access, analyse, create and act using all forms of communication. Media literacy builds upon traditional literacy and offers new forms of reading and writing and empowers people to be critical thinkers.

The concept of media literacy, like that of literacy itself, has long proved contentious. It is also seen as the knowledge, the attitudes, and the sum of the skills needed to know when and what information is needed; where and how to obtain that information; how to evaluate it critically and organise it once it is found; and how to use it in an ethical way. The concept extends beyond communication and information technologies to encompass learning, critical thinking, and interpretative skills across and beyond professional and educational boundaries (Luke, 2018). It is clear that media literacy overlaps with other areas of competence, notably information literacy. It depends extensively on the prior existence of basic literacy skills. Media literacy is a lifelong learning process. As media literacy covers a number of disciplines, it involves different descriptions and definitions. Meanwhile, this concept has also led to various approaches due to its content and coverage of a widespread application area. Therefore, media literacy (ML) simply put is the ability to identify different types of media and the messages they are sending. As technology

changes, so does the media literacy skills, therefore a 21st century library staff need to keep updating their knowledge in order to remain effective in services delivery.

Media Literacy skills in Libraries and Information Centres

To be an effective media literate staff of the library, skills to be adopted include accessibility, analytical, evaluation, communication and participative skills.

Accessibility Skill:

Accessibility skill involves locating and using appropriate media tools and comprehending the meanings of the contents so as to provide information pertinent to users' needs. It has to do with reaching the targeted information via media tools. It is also regarded as skills to search and choose important information out of multiple diversified internet sources using technologies like mobile phones, ipads, televisions and computers and more importantly, technological knowledge of a certain level to access these media contents are needed. For library staff to participate in the media culture as a creator or consumer, it is prerequisite to possess accessibility skills. However, it should be noted that physical access to media messages or media tools does not guarantee effective use of them. With respect to the accessibility skill which has social, cultural and technological aspects, factors such as having the permission to use media tools, knowing the use of software, peergroup norms regarding accepted actions are important (Jolls and Wilson, 2014). In this sense, access can be regarded as consisting of two phases, which are physical access to media and contents of media, and the ability to use the media properly.

Analytical Skill:

Analytical skill is regarded as a competency needed by librarians in examining the structure, content, design, form and sequence of media tools. It also means that authorship, audience, form and type of the message, points of view, characters, subjects and themes, mood, setting and context of media tools are analysed by librarians to ascertain objectivity of the media contents. It also involves assessing media contents, reliability and acceptance. Analytical skill refers to dividing messages into meaningful units. This means that when library staff encounter media messages, they either adopt these messages superficially or they break these messages into parts and get deep into the messages by examining these parts separately. In this process, authorship, audience, form and type of the message and points of view, characters, subjects and themes, mood, setting and context in these messages are analysed. A media literate library staff with analytical skills is aware that a media message is a product of planned work and clearly sees the limit between the real world and the world virtually created by the media. Besides, a media literate individual analyses literary strategies, possibilities and context; knows how media symbols are used; knows that media uses specific techniques to create emotional influence and perceives the implicit meaning as well as the explicit meaning in the messages. According to Gainer (2010), a media literate library staff needs to have a sufficient grasp of the background, structure and functioning of media industry to be able to comprehend and discuss what is offered through media.

To complete the analytical phase, evaluation skill is needed to make judgements about the quality or the value of a media content.

Evaluation skill:

Evaluative skill is regarded as a competency needed to make judgements about the quality or the value of a media content. This implies that credibility of information is considered as an important factor to decide whether to use information for academic purposes or not to use. Evaluating skill in this study also means interpreting messages of different types and forms, to identifies and avoids unsolicited and harmful media content. It is the competency needed to evaluate the objectivity of the information to ascertain its relevance to library users' needs. Evaluation skill is used to make conclusive judgement on access and analysis. Making a judgement is performed via comparing media content with a standard or a value measure. These values may be ethical, moral, scientific or democratic principles. In the evaluation process, taking the potential effects or outcomes of the messages into account is also important because one needs to evaluate the media content that they accessed and analysed previously by relating the messages to one's own experiences and making judgements about the reality and quality of the messages (Potter, 2010). In addition, when interpreting messages of different types and forms, a media literate individual identifies and avoids unsolicited and harmful media content and evaluates the objectivity of the information in media messages. The evaluation process in which individuals question media contents with respect to objectivity and reality is of vital importance for media literacy. That is why individuals need to possess broad knowledge structures regarding social, cultural, economic, political and historic contexts to make a critical evaluation and perceive the internet not as a source of true information but as a resource whereby information is questioned, evaluated and reflected upon.

Communication Skill:

Communication skill is regarded as a competency needed to construct and present professionally oriented content in various media formats and genres, taking into consideration the target audience. It comprises of competencies regarding creating media messages and sharing them with other people. The skill of communication is quite significant in the sense that it converts media consumers into media creators and distributors. Through this skill, librarians create and share their own media messages as an alternative to professionally created media contents, learn the processes of content selection, editing and construction. Learning to compose and create messages to express ideas using collaborative learning experiences with media production and digital tools is key literacy every 21st century librarian must know. Librarians can also express ideas and creativity by performing, making videos, recording podcasts, writing online, programming videogames, manipulating images, and creating other media that add value to their service delivery.

Participative Skill:

In this study, the skill of participation is regarded as librarians collaborating with media tools to find solution to problems in the library. It also involves competencies needed to collaborate and benefit from different digitally mediated research organisations, social networks and library associations for sharing of professional knowledge and intercultural experience. According to Eristi and Erdem (2017), participation or act in media literacy exist and involves competencies regarding being an active citizen via using media tools to find a resolution to problems in family, business, social circle, or society. This skill is quite related to the communication skill and is actually a part of it. Whereas only certain information and certain points of view are available in mainstream media, new media platforms have enabled those who cannot make their voice heard

to express themselves particularly with technologies that allow instant interaction. Through creating content and communicating them, library staff can actively participate in social life, support various campaigns and become active citizens who can defend their rights. The skill of participation involves content creation and sharing this with other people and thus participating in social life. According to Joll and Wilson (2014), measuring levels of library staff's media literacy skills is highly significant to identify their weaknesses and provide them with relevant training for effective service delivery in libraries and information centres.

The way forward

Media literacy field should focus not only on media consumption but also on the new media and the participatory culture that develops along with the new media (Jenkins et al., 2006). Therefore, the focus of media literacy has expanded to include the internet and other new media in addition to traditional print and audio-visual media (Livingstone, 2003). The development of new communication technologies has transformed media consumers into media creators and the creation, sharing, and dissemination of original media messages are now defined among the characteristics of qualified media users (Literat, 2014). As people today face a bombardment of visual, audial and multimedia messages in every walk of life from televisions, newspapers and billboards to radios, sales catalogues and the internet, media literacy skills are of vital importance (İnal, 2009). Therefore, librarians can now use media tools intensely in service delivery and the extensive use of these tools requires them to possess media literacy skills. Hence, media literacy skills are not a matter of preference but a necessity for effective service delivery in libraries and information centres.

Media is now a global power, shaping people's values, beliefs, behaviors, and decisions (Baran, 2014). Apart from the advantages offered by new technologies and media, there are serious

disadvantages of this fast-going process. Though it is now easier to attain information, the quality and credibility of the information that is bombarding people is a serious problem people confront today. Particularly, new media offers a platform for the ones whose voices are unheard in the mainstream media, and it has the potential to enable social participation, equal society, and equal representation for all. However, there are also issues of privacy, security, bullying, addiction, or phishing (Burnett & Merchant, 2011). The pervasive spread of media among individuals from all ages necessitates that individual should possess new sets of skills and knowledge. This sets of skills and knowledge gather under the umbrella of media literacy which is regarded as a 21st century skill (The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009). This is particularly pivotal for the younger generation (Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Hence, media literacy education is now an obligation to libraries and information centres as opposed to a preference. For effective media literacy education, it is imperative that not only librarians who teach about literacy but also all other library staff need to be media literate. Librarians need media literacy skills to integrate new media in their training to enhance effective service delivery.

Conclusion

Media literacy skills involve the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of formats, both print and non-print. The study therefore concludes that accessibility, analytical, evaluative, communicative and participative skills used by librarians have several implications because they are growing up in a world saturated with media messages. By using media literacy skills, librarians develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of media both print and non-print, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques. More specifically, when media literacy skill is adopted in libraries, it can increase the librarians' understanding of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organized, and

how they construct reality. Media literacy skill can also provide librarians with the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, communicate and create media products in libraries.

The study also conclude that the skills of media literacy include among others the ability to make responsible choices and access information by locating and sharing materials and comprehending information and ideas; analyse messages in a variety of forms by identifying the author, purpose, and point of view and evaluating the quality and credibility of the content; create content in a variety of forms and take social action by working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems, in this case, in the library. These can be achieved when librarians' use access, analytical, evaluative, communicative and participative skills in their service delivery.

Media literacy is concerned with all media, including television, film and recorded music, the press, the internet, any other digital communication technology and traditional media. The purpose of media literacy is to raise the level of awareness of the different guises taken by the messages transmitted by the media that librarians encounters while discharging their duties. This can help librarians to recognize how media filter perceptions and convictions, mould popular culture and influence personal decisions. Hence, media literacy provides librarians with the capacity for critical analysis as well as creative problem solving capacities, turning them into productive consumers of information.

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